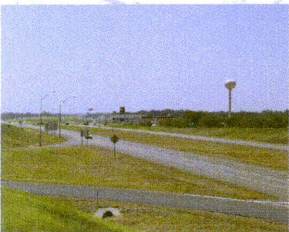


MAKING A RELIEF ROUTE WORK FOR YOUR COMMUNITY

by Susan Handy

TxDOT/University
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Making a Relief Route Work for Your Community



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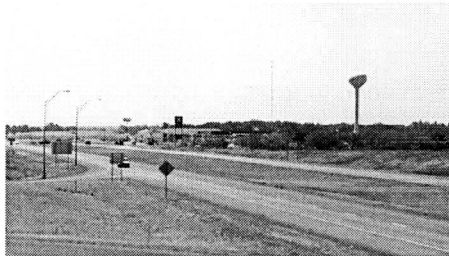
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WHAT DOES A RELIEF ROUTE MEAN FOR YOUR COMMUNITY?

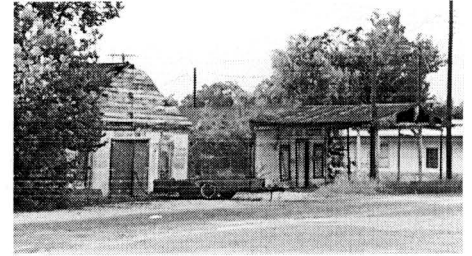
New Development?



Unfulfilled Expectations?



Economic Decline?

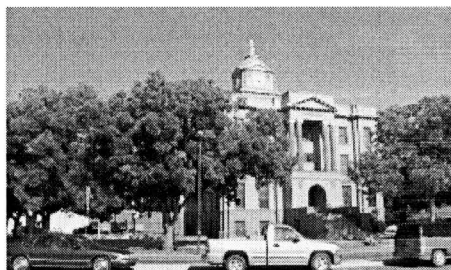


TxDOT builds relief routes for several reasons: to improve mobility in the region, to reduce traffic through town, and to improve safety and quality of life for residents. Despite these positive improvements, local residents and business owners may be concerned about the negative impacts of the relief route on the local economy. Many people assume that the shift in traffic from the old route to the relief route will mean a loss of customers for local businesses. Others may assume that the relief route will lead to new development in the community and help boost the local economy.

A relief route brings both potential opportunities and potential threats to a community. The reduction in traffic through town can benefit efforts to enhance the attractiveness of downtown to tourists and improve the accessibility of downtown to local residents. The relief route often provides a high level of access to developable land. But the reduction in through traffic also means a loss of pass-by customers for local businesses along the old route. The relief route might also increase competition for local businesses by improving access to neighboring communities and

by attracting new development, particularly national chains.

What happens in any particular community after the construction of a relief route depends on numerous factors. With funding from TxDOT, the University of Texas studied the changes in ten communities in Texas, all under 50,000 population, where relief routes have been constructed in the past few decades. They compared the changes in these communities to changes in four communities where relief routes have not been built. The goal of the study was to determine what changes could be attributed to the relief route and what changes were due to other factors. Here's what they found:



In Downtown:

Whether or not a relief route was built, most downtowns experienced a significant decline in traditional businesses that provide for the basic needs of local residents. Many of the county seats saw an increase in businesses related to the courthouse, and a few communities benefited from an increase in tourism-related businesses downtown. What explains these differences?

The decline in downtown businesses is largely due to changes in the retail industry nationwide, particularly the emergence of large discount stores such as Wal-Mart. Whether the Wal-Mart located in town or in a neighboring town, local businesses seemed to suffer. The retirement of existing business owners was also a factor, as often no one was left to take over the business. Where the demand for courthouse-related services was strong, these businesses naturally moved into the vacant spaces in downtown.

Antique shops also found a home downtown, particularly in communities with a growing tourism industry. Although many communities look to tourism as a source of growth for their economies, not all communities can make it work: the most successful not

only have a historic downtown but are also located on a heavily-traveled route between metropolitan areas and have



actively worked to encourage tourism, for example, through a Main Street Program. The decline in traffic through town after the construction of the relief route can benefit an already strong tourism industry.

On the Old Route:

In most communities, businesses along the old route have declined significantly. A few communities have seen little change along the old route. A few others have seen considerable growth in retail businesses along the old route. What explains these differences?

Although the obvious explanation for the decline in businesses along the old route is the decline in traffic, other factors have also been important. Full-service gas stations, for example, have been affected by an industry shift to multi-pump convenience stores and by EPA regulations that are costly to comply with. Local gas stations, restaurants, and motels have all been affected by increased competition from national chains. Even towns without relief routes have seen a noticeable decline in locally-owned businesses catering to through traffic.

A few communities have seen lit-

tle change in businesses along the old route, mostly because these businesses depended more on local customers than on through traffic. The reasons why a handful of communities have seen considerable growth in retail businesses along the old route despite the opening of the relief route are less obvious. In these communities, the community has remained important as a commercial center for the surrounding region, and the location of the Wal-Mart on the old route has attracted other businesses to the area.

On the Relief Route:

Although many city leaders hope that a relief route will bring new development, the process is a slow one. In most communities, the amount of development along the relief route did not live up to local expectations. At the same time, a few communities have seen significant development along the relief route. In all cases, however, few



existing businesses have relocated to the relief route. The net result is not an increase in retail activity in town, rather a shift of activity from downtown and the old route to the relief route and a shift from local businesses to chains.

A variety of factors explain the limited amount of development along most relief routes. In some communities, the alignment of the relief route is beyond city limits, meaning that the properties along the relief route are not served by city utilities. In others

existing zoning discouraged development, and in some, existing land uses provided a deterrent. Land owners can also be an impediment to development if they choose not to sell their land or develop it themselves. Topography, rail lines, and other geographic features can also hinder development. In a few cases, poor visibility from the relief route and the placement of the exits may have helped to limit development as well. But frontage roads are mostly not a factor, because development occurs mostly just at the interchanges.

A few communities have seen extensive development along the relief route, mostly thanks to geographical features. Being close - but not too close - to a metropolitan area can increase the demand for services on the highway. Being a natural stopping point - either because of distance to other towns and/or turn off point for travelers - can also increase the demand. The provision of city utilities to the properties along the relief route combined with permissive zoning is not enough to ensure new development. At the same time, few local businesses have the resources to relocate to the relief route.



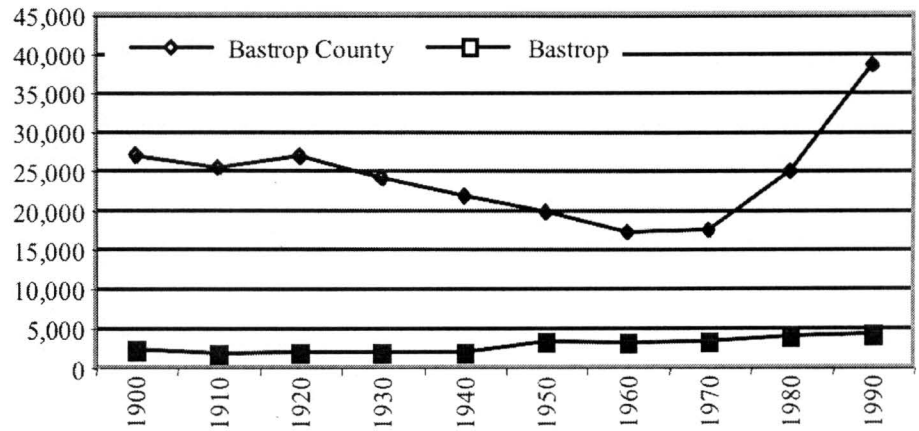
The Bottom Line:

Most of the changes - good and bad - experienced by small towns in Texas over the past few decades were not caused by relief routes. The decline of traditional businesses in downtown and along the old route would have happened even if the relief route had not been built. But relief routes have clearly had some impact on these communities. They have encouraged a shift in retail activity from downtown and the old route to the new route. They have made it easier for local residents to get to bigger cities nearby and have thus increased competition for local businesses. But they have also reduced traffic through town and thereby improved safety, reduced noise and air pollution, and otherwise improved quality of life for local residents.

The relief route is just one factor of many contributing to changes in small towns in Texas. These changes are largely beyond the control of the town - but not entirely. Residents can both maximize the benefits of the relief route and minimize the costs to the community by actively participating in a cooperative effort to plan for the relief route.

BASTROP SH 71 Relief Route

Population of Bastrop and Bastrop County, 1900-1990



Located approximately 30 miles southeast of downtown Austin at the junction of SH 21, SH 95 and SH 71, Bastrop's early economy depended on farming, timber and mining. In the 1920s small, productive oilfields were discovered and ranching rose into prominence. The county seat for Bastrop County, Bastrop evolved into a major retail center for the county and is a hub for a growing exurban community. Proximity to Austin fueled its growth during the 1980s and 1990s; commuters moved to Bastrop for affordable housing and a rural setting.

SH 71 is a major corridor that runs from west central Texas through Austin and Bastrop to the Gulf of Mexico. A relief route was built in 1960 to alleviate congestion in downtown. It was built close to downtown as an uncontrolled access facility and has become a commercial corridor that caters to Bastrop and neighboring communities rather than through traffic.

After a period of economic slowdown, development along the relief route picked up during the mid 1980s. Large-scale retail stores like Wal-Mart and HEB, car dealerships, restaurants,

medical services, etc. located on the relief route. Many fast food and service stations also appeared on the route. Few local businesses could move to the relief route due to high property values along the route. Bastrop's success in preserving its historic downtown prevented the downtown from deteriorating even after the relief route came in. The buildings vacated by some businesses were soon filled up with antique and gift shops or courthouse-related businesses.

The route contributed to the emergence of two distinct business districts in Bastrop: businesses on the relief route provide day-to-day retail services for residents; downtown Bastrop serves courthouse-related businesses, title companies, attorneys and a growing number of tourists. The distance

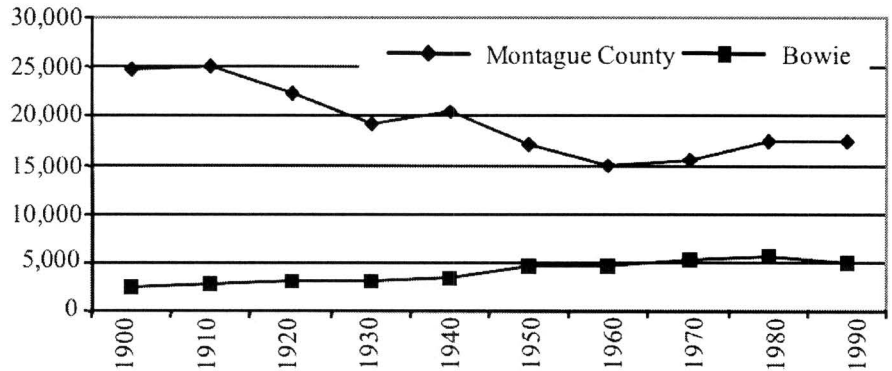


from Austin and easy accessibility are two factors that contribute to Bastrop's economic prosperity.

BOWIE US 287 Relief Route



Population for Bowie and Montague County, 1900-1990



Bowie is located at the convergence of US 287, US 81, and SH 59 about 70 miles northwest of Fort Worth and 49 miles southeast of Wichita Falls and US 287. An agricultural center in Montague County, the city's population peaked in 1910, and declined through the 1950s. Since then, population has remained relatively constant, and many residents of Bowie commute to Fort Worth, Denton, and Wichita Falls. Bowie is gradually becoming a bedroom community for Fort Worth.

US 287 was a two-lane thoroughfare through Bowie; the relief route is a four-lane, controlled-access facility with four exits to Bowie. A segment of the relief route has one-way frontage roads; other segments have two-way frontage roads. Built in 1978, it is approximately three-quarters of a

mile from the old route and downtown Bowie.

After completion of the route, the number of service stations along the old route declined noticeably. Consolidation in the service station industry and the rise of large discounters affected retail in Bowie. Downtown changed into a tourist-oriented destination, with day visitors to the antique stores in the downtown area. Large discount stores and malls in other communities were seen as the main reason for the decline of retail in the downtown area, but the relief route was seen as a contributing factor. Along with major changes in the retailing sector, declines in oil and agriculture also hurt local business. A positive impact of the relief route was a decrease in traffic downtown.

Development route has been modest, ranging from service stations to a feedlot. Residents expected more development. Factors inhibiting development include difficult development conditions; the route was outside the city limits and no utilities were provided. Hilly terrain with rocky soil hampered the extension of utilities. Other factors include the railroad, expensive land prices, some land was involved in an estate battle, the feedlot ("it's not

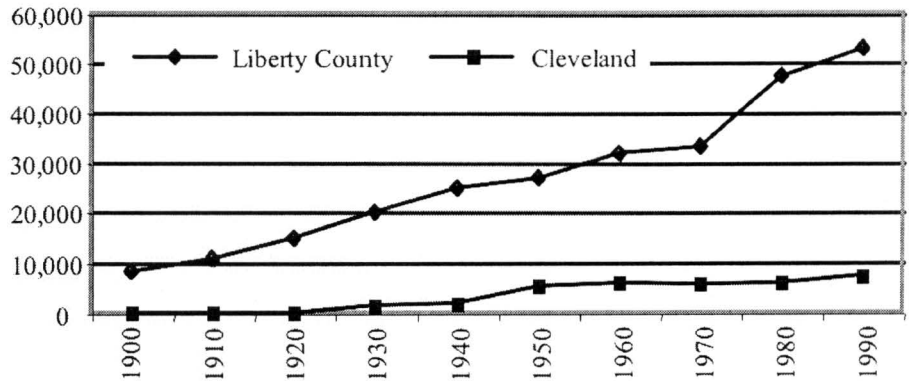




like people want to eat at a Burger King next to a feed yard"), and proximity to competing markets, such as Decatur.

CLEVELAND US 59 Relief Route

Population for Cleveland and Liberty County, 1900-1990



Historically an exporter of oil, gas, timber, cattle, sand, gravel, and agricultural goods, Cleveland is located 46 miles northeast of downtown Houston and has become a bedroom community of Houston. US 59 is the major road linking Cleveland to Houston, and is part of the proposed Interstate 69.

Most of US 59 in this region has been upgraded to a four-lane, controlled-access facility, including the segment around Cleveland. The relief route was completed in 1988, and runs one mile west of the old route. Planning and construction took close to twenty-five years, and delays and uncertainty over the alignment meant many property and business owners postponed relocation and development plans pending right-of-way purchases.

factors other than the route are largely to blame. The opening of regional malls in College Station and Humble made it hard for local businesses to survive; local merchants retired with no one willing or able to take over the business. Service stations also suffered a decline, but other factors played a role: new EPA regulations on underground storage tanks that required tank replacement, industry consolidation, and the increasing shift to larger multi-pump convenience stores.



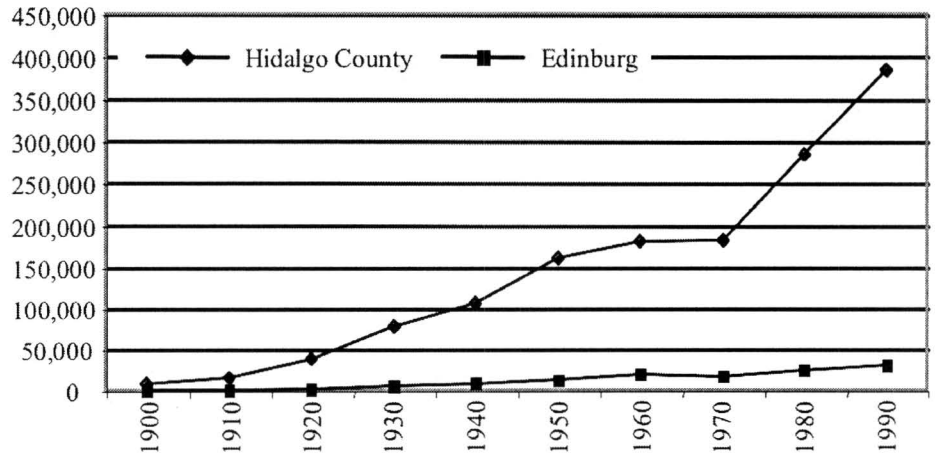
Downtown Cleveland experienced a severe decline concurrent with the completion of the relief route, although

Development on the relief route was slow in the first ten years after completion of the route, but has since increased. A handful of local businesses relocated to the relief route, followed by national chains. Possible development is limited because a majority of the route is built through a flood plain. Residents and business owners agree that through travelers and the truck-

ing industry benefited, but community impacts were mixed. The route went through residential areas, and 30 to 40 houses were relocated. Adjacent neighborhoods experienced increased noise, but fewer accidents occur on local streets. The main thoroughfare can be crossed without stoplights.

EDINBURG US 281 Relief Route

Population for Edinburg and Hidalgo County, 1900-1990



Located in the valley, Edinburg is part of the McAllen-Hidalgo County Metropolitan Statistical Area (MSA) and is the county seat of Hidalgo County. Its population reached about 50,000 in 2000. Tourism and trade with Mexico has fueled recent growth.

Edinburg is on US 281, a part of the proposed Interstate 69 NAFTA corridor. The relief route was completed in 1977, and runs approximately one mile east of the original downtown route. It is a four-lane, controlled-access facility with one-way frontage roads. Several exits provide access into Edinburg. The choice of alignment for the route was controversial. Many residents favored a western route to encourage growth between McAllen and Edinburg. A large portion of the Mexican-American community favored an eastern route as an opportunity to replace substandard housing in the colonias on the east side of town.

Edinburg has changed significantly since the relief route, but most changes are due to other factors. The few highway-related businesses found along the old route have closed. Retail business-

es have declined downtown, but this decline can mostly be attributed to discount stores and changes in consumer habits. As the county seat of a populous county, law firms and support services for government have moved into vacat-



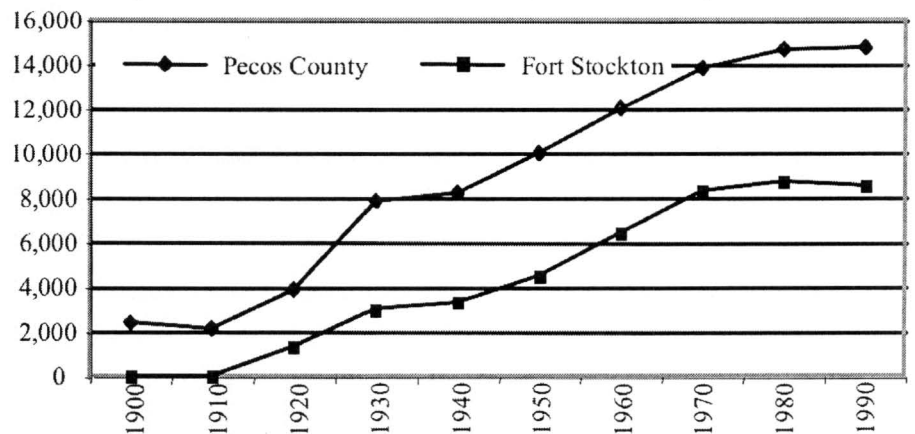
ed retail space. Residents have benefited from reduced traffic downtown. The route has made it easier to commute to McAllen for work and shopping.

Development on the relief route has been slow. Some development was facilitated through controversial public-private partnerships with the city. An industrial park has attracted a broad range of industries, but the only highway-related business after twenty years was a joint venture between Burger

King and a convenience store. Agricultural zoning limited development until recent zoning changes. The water supply corporation providing water to the area has not promoted growth along the route aggressively. Edinburg is not a natural stopping point for trips to the valley: many people continue to McAllen, Brownsville, or Pharr.

FORT STOCKTON IH 10 Relief Route

Population for Fort Stockton and Pecos County, 1900-1990



Founded as a military fort in 1859, Fort Stockton grew into a center for sheep and cattle ranching. In the 1920s, oil was discovered in the area. Fort Stockton is 329 miles west of San Antonio and 245 miles east of El Paso and provides a natural stopping point for travellers. US 67, US 385, US 285 and Interstate 10/US 290 converge on Fort Stockton, cementing its role as a travel center. The largest community in the Big Bend region, it has a much larger market area than other towns its size. People from as far away as Presidio, over 125 miles away, come to shop.

The IH 10 relief route in Fort Stockton was completed in 1983. A four-lane, controlled-access facility with two-lane frontage roads, IH 10 has five interchanges in the area. The relief route is one mile north of the old route on Dickinson. At the request of local residents, this project was the last stretch of IH 10 to be completed in Texas.

Downtown Fort Stockton, on Main Street, is approximately one mile south of the old route on Dickinson. The relief route may have contributed to a

decline in the downtown as businesses on Dickinson relocated to the Interstate and businesses downtown relocated to Dickinson, but other factors were also important: the decline in the oil industry, the closing of a Firestone testing center, and the opening of Wal-Mart.

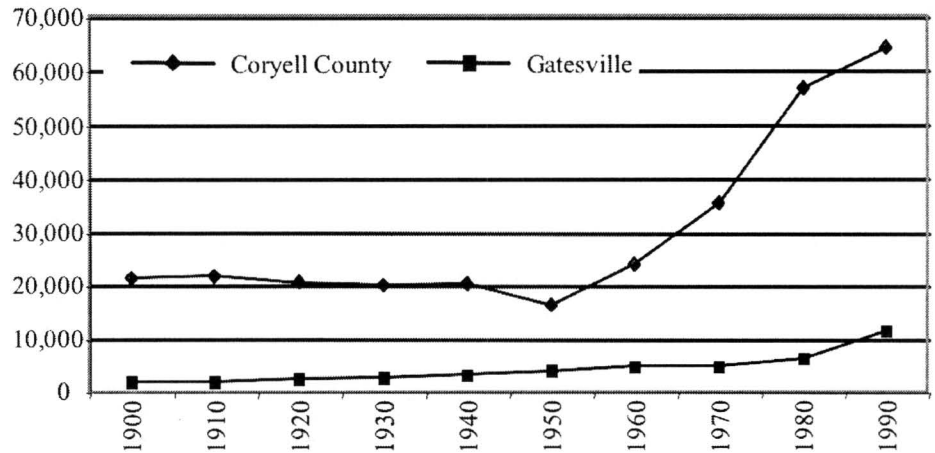


Highway-related businesses, such as service stations, restaurants, and hotels, were more directly impacted. A number of full-service gas stations on the old route closed. A few restaurants relocated to the relief route but many did not. Most new development has clustered around several new motels, which are franchises of national chains, within sight of the Interstate. Existing motels on Dickinson declined, and the extra competition drove down room prices, resulting in less motel tax collection for the city.

Residents hoped for distribution facilities and other industries, but, non-highway related development has not occurred. Geographic isolation, relatively low traffic volumes, changes in the national economy, declines in agriculture and oil, and Fort Stockton's position as a natural stopping point on IH 10 explain most of the changes. Residents appreciate the decline in truck traffic through town.

GATESVILLE SH 36 Relief Route

Population for Gatesville and Coryell County, 1900-1990



Gatesville, the county seat of Coryell County, is at the intersection of US 84 and SH 36. Approximately thirty miles west of Waco and north of Fort Hood, the economy and transportation needs are dominated by adult correctional facilities. Almost half of Gatesville's 15,000 inhabitants are inmates. The prisons employ approximately 3,500 people; most do not live in Gatesville. Shift changes at the prisons overwhelm the transportation system three times a day.

The SH 36 relief route is a two-lane, uncontrolled-access facility completed in 1986, and runs three to four miles east of downtown. The prisons are on the northern edge of town, and the relief route connects with the old route just north of the prisons. It was built because of traffic congestion on the old route. The primary area of congestion was, and continues to be, the portion of the old SH 36 that merges with US 84 through the center of town.

Since the route opened, downtown has lost traditional retail businesses. Approximately half of downtown commercial space is now filled with pro-

fessional offices, mostly related to the courthouse. The Main Street program seems to have stabilized the downtown area, but the commercial center of town moved to the eastern intersection of the old SH 36 and US 84 in the 1970s, where Wal-Mart has acted as a magnet for other businesses.



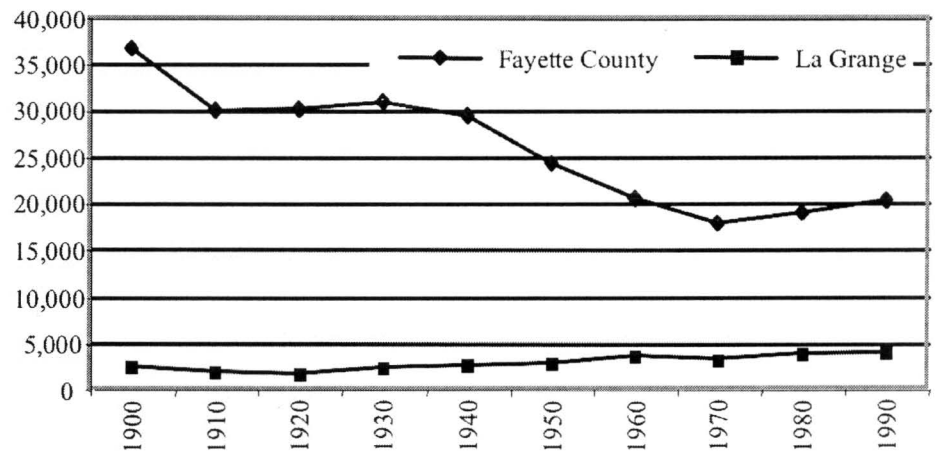
Development along the relief route has been slow. One reason is the location of the prisons: the lights and around-the-clock operations deter some types of development. Some landowners want an increase in land prices before they sell, and some will only sell to certain kinds of businesses due to concerns about the type of growth that will occur. Until recently, utilities were not fully available to properties along the relief route. Some residents and city leaders fear that infrastructure pro-

vision will lead to low-income housing for the prison employees.

One of the striking characteristics of Gatesville is that the old SH 36/US 84 corridor remains the viable commercial center for the community. There are rumors that Wal-Mart wants to build a Wal-Mart SuperCenter in the area, and their current location does not have expansion capacity. If Wal-Mart moves, then a large portion of the commercial core of the community would probably shift with it.

LA GRANGE SH 71 Relief Route

Population for La Grange and Fayette County, 1900-1990



La Grange, the county seat of Fayette County, is located approximately 60 miles east of Austin and 100 miles west of Houston at the junction of SH 71 and SH 77. Its economy was based on agriculture until the 1960s. The city has worked successfully to create a more diversified economy and the town has seen steady population growth recently. Tourism based on the history and cultural heritage of the area has become increasingly important.

The SH 71 relief route was intended to reduce congestion downtown and restore access to businesses. It was built in 1991 as a four-lane, controlled-access facility with two-way frontage roads and four exits to La Grange. It is located about 2 miles north of the downtown. The route in La Grange was a result of a long negotiation process between the community and TxDOT.

Downtown and the commercial areas along the old route were not significantly affected by the relief route. New businesses opened after the relief route was built, and relatively few businesses closed. As in most towns, some

full-service stations closed, replaced by gas stations with convenience stores. Reduced traffic helped the town's successful Main Street Program; downtown



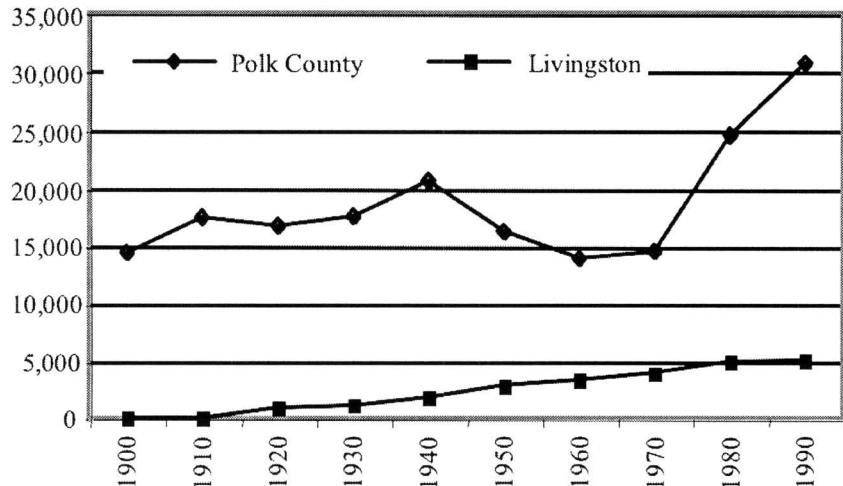
business owners and local officials actively participate, and tourist-oriented businesses have thrived. Significant development occurred along the old route even after the new route was built, including hotels, fast food restaurants and convenience stores that are clearly oriented towards highway traffic. Development along the relief route is limited to the interchanges. The city's decision to annex and provide utilities only to the land around the interchanges may have been influenced by reluctance of local landowners to subdividing and selling their land.

The overall effect of the relief route has been positive. It did not hurt existing businesses downtown or on the

old route and has been an asset to the Main Street Program. The route has not seen much development; this can be attributed to the limited annexation and utility extension policies of the city. The Main Street program is used effectively to maintain a physically attractive downtown with a diverse base of businesses. Traffic from SH 77 may also play an important role in maintaining the vitality of downtown.

LIVINGSTON US 59 Relief Route

Population of Livingston and Polk County, 1900-1990



Livingston, the county seat of Polk County, is located at the junction of US 190 and US 59, approximately 70 miles north of Houston. The town began as an agricultural center; oil was discovered in 1932. The current economy is based on the timber industry, oil, cotton, truck farming and tourism. Lake Livingston generates much weekend traffic during the summer. Livingston has a large retirement community and is becoming a bedroom community for Houston.

US 59 is a major north-south NAFTA corridor and part of the proposed Interstate 69. The US 59 relief route was completed in 1981 as a four-lane, controlled-access facility located about one mile west of the town and the old route. The old route, Washington Avenue, is several blocks from downtown. Retail businesses downtown moved closer to the relief route and were replaced by courthouse-related businesses.

The old route was impacted to a much greater degree. Many businesses closed, and no new development occurred after the relief route opened.

Service stations and motels had to adapt their services for local patronage. Many closed, as result of reduced traffic but they were also impacted by industry consolidation, new competition,



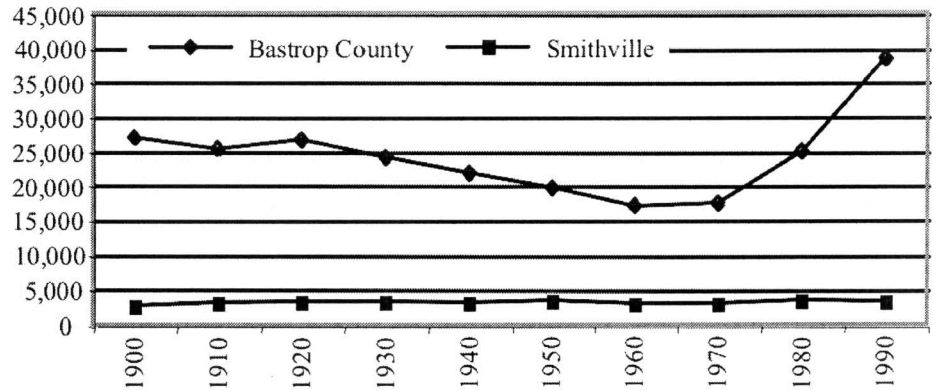
and new environmental regulations. A regional shopping center in Humble, 53 miles south of town, opened in the mid 1980s and gained much of Livingston's business. The relief route has seen significant development since 1981, assisted by a proactive annexation policy. Most development occurred at interchanges. New businesses include Wal-Mart and HEB. A few local businesses relocated to the relief route, including local automobile dealerships. Several

restaurants were built near or on the relief route.

The route improved traffic and safety by funneling unmanageable weekend traffic out of town. Livingston also benefits from its proximity to Lake Livingston and Houston. A proactive approach by the local community in addressing possible challenges posed by the relief route was an important factor in sustaining the town's economic health. These factors, combined with local efforts, directed development along the relief route and gave the town a new corridor for growth.

SMITHVILLE SH 71 Relief Route

Population for Smithville and Bastrop County, 1900-1990



Smithville is located in Bastrop County at the junction of SH71 and SH 95, 43 miles east of Austin. Smithville's economy was linked to the railroad, and the local economy suffered a setback when the railroad exited in the 1950s. In more recent times, Smithville's retail and service sectors have been losing ground to competition from Bastrop, 13 miles west of Smithville. The town's population has grown steadily since the 1960s and it is developing into a bedroom community and tourist center.

SH 71 is a major transportation corridor running from west central Texas to the Gulf of Mexico. A relief route was proposed in the 1960s. Completed in 1984 as a controlled-access facility with two exits for the town, it is approximately one mile north of downtown. Before it was built, Smithville was a town with a declining economic base and a growing commuter population. Despite continued population growth, little has changed in the town.

In the early 1990s, ten years after the completion of the relief route, the downtown lost pharmacies, grocery stores, cafes, dry goods stores and car dealerships. This decline is more likely due to factors such as the retirement

of local business owners and the rapid growth of commercial enterprises in Bastrop during the mid-1980s rather than to the relief route. Several antique stores later occupied the vacant buildings downtown, but these businesses are viewed by some local residents as an indicator of a failing economy.



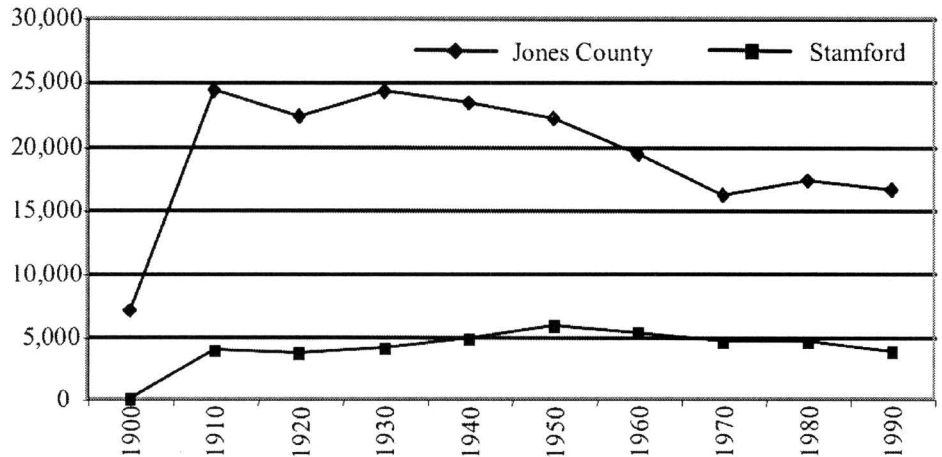
The route's most significant benefits have been safety and traffic improvements. It also enabled Smithville to expand its town limits and allowed residential growth. However, a dramatic drop in traffic downtown contributed to a loss of highway-related businesses such as fast food restaurants. Many full-service gas stations closed due to expensive EPA regulations, competition from self-service stations and the reduced highway traffic.

Contrary to local expectations, there has not been significant development on the relief route. Factors limiting

development include apathy towards growth by large landowners along the route, the route's distance from downtown, poor visibility of the interchanges, and competition from other retail centers such as Bastrop. The main factors behind Smithville's present economic situation are the lack of a diversified local economy and retail competition from bigger communities such as Bastrop and Austin.

STAMFORD US 277 Relief Route

Population for Stamford and Jones County, 1900-1990



Stamford is located at the junction of US 277 and SH 6, 40 miles north of Abilene on the border of Jones and Haskell counties. It has provided services to surrounding farms and ranches since its inception. Oil was discovered in 1935; wells are no longer productive. Stamford has been in decline since the 1950s due largely to the decline of agriculture in the nation's economy. Declining population and periodic drought in the region also weakened the local economy.

The US 277 relief route was built in Stamford in 1987 to improve traffic patterns and pedestrian safety by decreasing downtown congestion. It is a four-lane, controlled-access facility with two-way frontage roads. Three exits provide access to Stamford. The relief route is one-half mile west of downtown and skirts the developed areas of town.

The relief route successfully decreased downtown traffic; the reduced traffic may have expedited the closure of several local businesses. Poor visibility from the relief route is a problem; motorists drive past Stamford without realizing it. Other changes coincided

with the advent of the route, but were not caused by it. Wal-Mart opened in Stamford in the mid-1980s and led to the closure of local businesses that were either unable or unwilling to compete. Convenience stores replaced full-service gas stations; changing EPA regulations and industry-wide changes were also factors in these closures.

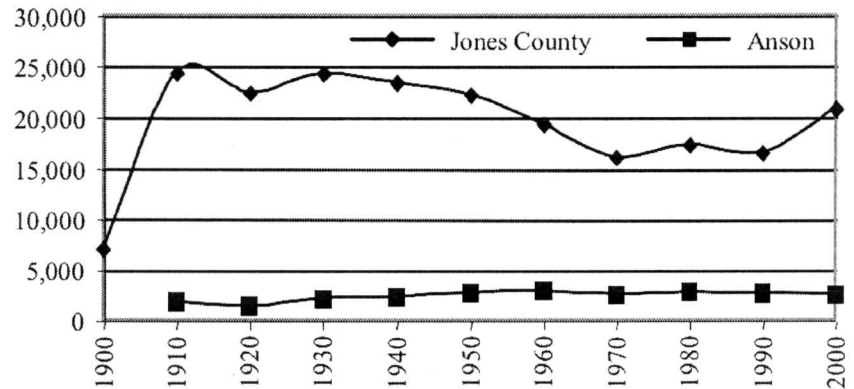


Little development has occurred on the relief route. The relatively light traffic on the relief route is not sufficient to attract highway-oriented businesses or other development. The town may also have been harmed by its location in a dry precinct. Its location between similarly sized communities, Anson and Haskell, that provide highway-related services and easy access to Abilene, also negatively impacted Stamford's opportunities.

The expected rejuvenation of the local economy after completion of the relief route did not occur. Stamford proves that transportation improvements alone cannot turn around a waning economy. The town's downturn was caused by a combination of factors including an economy tied to agriculture, the end of oil production, low highway traffic, retail competition from malls in Abilene and the Wal-Mart in Stamford, and proximity to similar sized communities that provided comparable services.

ANSON No Relief Route

Population of Anson and Jones County, 1900-2000

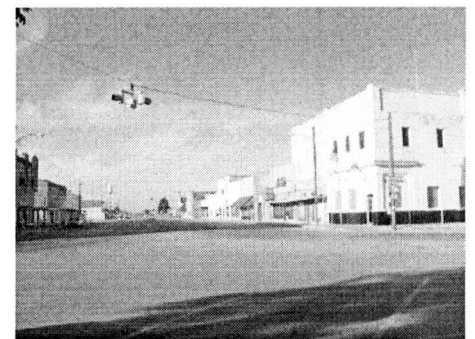


The county seat of Jones County, Anson sits at the intersection of US 277, US 83 and US 180, 23 miles north of Abilene. Through the 1970s, Anson's economy was dependent on agricultural and oilfield-related activities. The mechanization of agriculture coupled with the depletion of the oilfields resulted in job losses. As a result, people left, and the drought-prone region has continued to see the exit of young families to more prosperous metropolitan areas.

US 277 creates unfavorable traffic conditions downtown, but is perceived as vital for the economy because it gives visibility to the community's businesses. US Hwy 277 splits to run around the historic courthouse. The lanes merge back together after passing the courthouse. Despite traffic problems, US 277 is viewed favorably for bringing motorists through town, who stop to take pictures of the courthouse and look around the local stores. It also brings in residents from outlying communities who realize that they can buy basic goods and other necessities in Anson without having to drive to Abilene.

The advent of large-scale retail stores in the region changed shopping

patterns in the early 1980s and many local "mom and pop" stores closed after the opening of Wal-Marts in Stamford and Abilene and malls in Abilene during this time. The slow economy, industry consolidation, declining population, the growth of convenience stores, and new environmental regulations also led to the closure of many full service gas stations. Local motel businesses may have been hurt by proximity to Abilene, which offers more restaurants and the availability of liquor. Lack of financial resources is an obstacle in providing incentive packages to new businesses to locate in Anson.

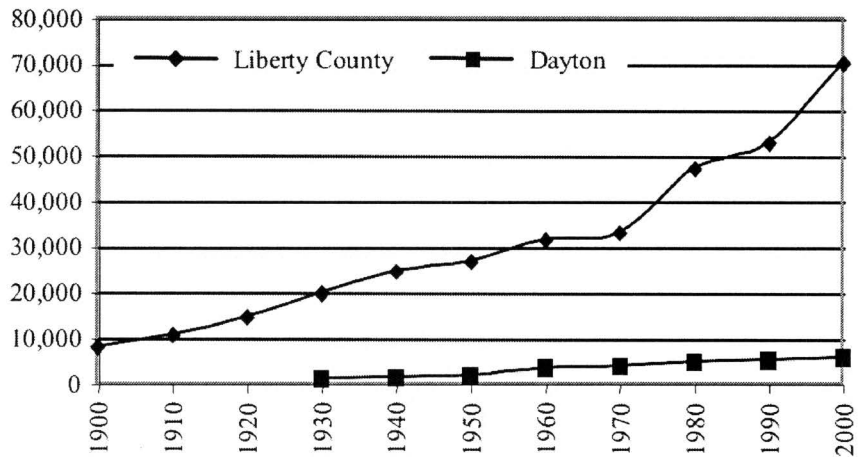


Old buildings, mostly vacant and in various stages of disrepair, border the courthouse. These buildings tell the story of numerous rural communities. Present-day Anson is faced with

limited job opportunities, a diminishing working population and little sales tax revenue, although it is trying to reposition itself as a bedroom community for Abilene. People working in Abilene would be able to find affordable housing more easily in Anson, which has a good water supply and a good school district. The town is currently working towards improving the quality of services it can offer to potential residents, including additional housing stock and sound infrastructure provisions.

DAYTON No Relief Route

Population of Dayton and Liberty County, 1900-2000



Dayton is located in rapidly growing Liberty County 43 miles northeast of Houston on the main line of Union Pacific railroad and on US 90. The town's early economic activities focused on agricultural activities. In the 1920s, oil production began in the region. The collapse of the oil industry in the late 1970s and early 1980s significantly affected the local economy. The nationwide decline in agriculture also affected the local farming community.

Until the late 1970s, Dayton had a vibrant downtown; today there is little retail activity. Vacant buildings are common; nearly all the retail businesses that were open in the late 1970s have closed or been replaced by antique stores and resale shops. Commercial activity on US 90 is limited to fast food franchises and convenience stores. The opening of retail centers such as Wal-Mart in Liberty, large shopping malls in Humble and Baytown, and others affected Dayton. Businesses also closed when owners retired with no one to take over the business. Dayton's proximity to larger communities seem to have made it difficult for the town to build a strong

local economy. Other factors that led to economic decline include a lack of full support from the local community and a lack of infrastructure. Infrastructure seems to hamper the town's development even today.

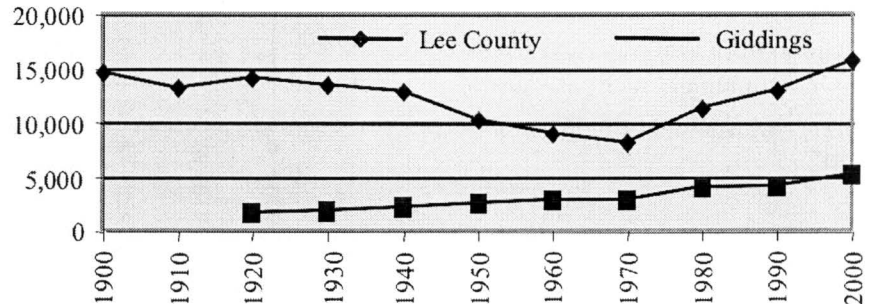


The transportation networks around Dayton, including the Union Pacific railroad, are seen as important assets to the town and its future development. US 90 passes through the middle of the town and is considered vital for the economy, although traffic congestion is an issue. The recent designation of a Foreign Trade Zone near the railroad is seen as one of Dayton's most significant economic developments. Currently, Dayton's economic future seems to be highly dependent on its connectivity

with the region. Dayton has gone from a self-sufficient agrarian and natural resource-based community to one with limited economic opportunities, but it is working to restore its prominence as a railroad hub. Dayton faces a rapidly expanding commuter population on its outskirts, housing shortages, inadequate infrastructure and high property values in its commercial district. These seemingly contradictory issues can only be explained by Dayton's proximity to Houston.

GIDDINGS No Relief Route

Population of Lee County and Giddings, 1900-2000



Giddings, the county seat of Lee County, is at the crossroads of US 290 and 77 approximately 60 miles east of Austin. The town was laid out with wide streets; both main thoroughfares were 100 feet wide. Originally, agriculture dominated the economy. In the early 1980s, the area experienced an oil boom. Its economy has benefited from being a stopping point between Houston and Austin.

Giddings has been impacted by many of the changes that have affected small town America over the last 20-30 years. During the 1970s, downtown could supply almost every shopping need for residents. Today, it has lost much of its retail presence and is no longer the retail/commercial hub of the city. The bulk of the retail presence has migrated eastward on Highway 290, where Wal-Mart opened a store approximately 20 years ago.

Full-service gas stations have been closing; there are two left. Taking their place are multi-pump convenience stores in an ongoing industry change. Some stations may have closed as a result of owners' retiring, but they were still having trouble competing. Restaurants and eating establishments have also followed industry trends. Giddings has seen a decline in sit-down restaurants and an increase in fast-food

restaurants. Several full-service restaurants closed when the owners retired with no one to take over the business. The motel industry has been relatively stable.

Giddings is expected to grow due to its proximity to the Austin metropolitan area, but this trend may be tempered by anti-growth feelings in some segments of the community. Giddings' own economy offers limited opportunities for young people in the community. The city's sales tax base is healthy and reflects the importance of the community as a central stopping point between Austin and Houston.

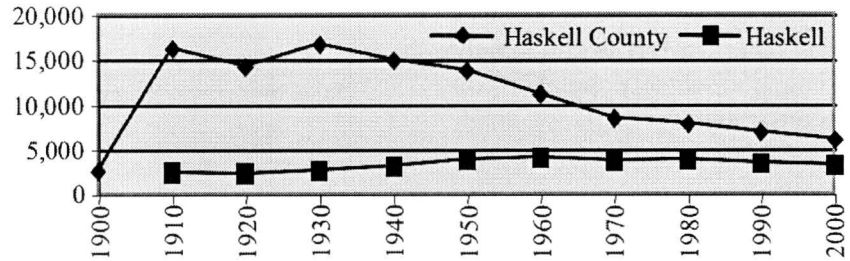


Traffic, which has increased considerably over time, plays an important role for Giddings' tax base. This traffic, as well as Giddings proximity to a major metropolitan area, have helped buffer the community from the declines seen in more rural areas. Highway traf-

fic has bolstered an impressive array of fast food establishments, but has not prevented the service station industry from change. Likewise, Giddings' downtown has declined notably from 20 years ago, due to increased retail competition from Wal-Mart and neighboring communities such as Austin, Bryan-College Station, Brenham, and Bastrop.

HASKELL No Relief Route

Population of Haskell and Haskell County, 1900-2000



Haskell, at the junction of US 380 and 277, is the county seat of Haskell County. Historically, the local economy was based on agriculture. The discovery of oil in the early 1940s gave a boost to the economy, but Haskell's downturn began with a prolonged drought during the 1950s followed by a decline in local oil production. The town's population peaked in 1960, as changes in agriculture and the end of oil production have drained the countryside of many residents in the last 30 years.

Downtown used to be able to meet almost all basic retail needs. However, the past 20 to 30 years have seen many store closures. The decline in agriculture and oil is only part of the reason. The opening of Wal-Mart in the early 1980s in Stamford, approximately fifteen miles south of Haskell, impacted many retail stores in Haskell, although its retail sector was already in decline. Haskell must also compete with Abilene, about one hour south, for the spending of local residents.

The service station industry has also seen significant change, with nearly 20 gas stations closing in the past 20 years. Currently only four multi-pump convenience stores are found in Haskell. Service stations closed for a variety of reasons, including the decline in population, changes in the industry, the retirement of local business owners, and

new environmental regulations. The restaurant industry in recent times appears to have been fairly stable, with six to eight eating establishments, mostly locally owned. One hotel and one motel, which depended on long-term business from oil workers, have closed in recent decades.



Haskell is involved in is a joint city/county partnership to build a 500-bed private prison. Construction is underway, and the prison is projected to open in 2002. After opening, the city and county may be able to obtain bonds to build another 500-segment unit, doubling capacity. The prison is seen as an important first step in developing an economy independent of the weather or not extractive in nature.

Haskell's economy has been negatively impacted by a number of trends. Changes in the retail industry, the decline in the agriculture and oil industries, and the resulting decline in the local population have led to a cycle of decline in the overall economic health of the community.

PLANNING FOR THE RELIEF ROUTE: THINGS FOR THE COMMUNITY TO THINK ABOUT

Priorities: residents, city leaders

- ⊙ What are the priorities of the community?
 - Encouraging new development along the relief route?
 - Protecting existing businesses?
 - Reducing traffic through town?
 - Others?

Annexation: city officials, property owners

- ⊙ Is the alignment of the relief route within city boundaries?
- ⊙ If not, can the city annex land adjacent to the new relief route?
- ⊙ The annexation may redirect growth along the relief route. Is this good or bad for your community?

Zoning: city officials, property owners, developers

- ⊙ What kind of development would the existing zoning along the relief route allow?
- ⊙ Are zoning changes needed to accommodate development along the route?
- ⊙ What type of development is expected along the route?
- ⊙ What land uses will be compatible with the existing land uses?
- ⊙ Zoning changes may redirect growth along the relief route. Is this good or bad for your community?

Infrastructure: city officials, property owners, utility providers

- ⊙ Are the properties along the relief route served by city utilities?
- ⊙ Can the city extend services to the properties along the relief route?
- ⊙ Utility extensions may redirect growth along the relief route. Is this good or bad for your community?

Advertising/ Marketing: city officials, chamber of commerce, business owners

- ⊙ Does the city have opportunities to establish a “brand” image?
- ⊙ What actions can the Chamber of Commerce take to advertise the city’s attractions?
 - City pride signs
 - Information kiosk
 - Newspaper
 - Radio
 - Events
 - Website
- ⊙ Are there opportunities for the city to get together with other communities in the area to do joint advertising?

Business Retention & Expansion: city officials, Community Development Corporation, Chamber of Commerce

- ⊙ Are any programs in place that would help to stabilize and retain downtown businesses?
- ⊙ Does the city have an Economic Development Plan?
- ⊙ Can the city give local businesses preference on opportunities to relocate to the relief route?

- ⊙ Can the city give tax breaks to help existing businesses compete with new ones?

Main Street Program: city officials, Chamber of Commerce, Texas Historic Commission

- ⊙ Has the city looked into the possibility of joining the Texas Main Street Program?
- ⊙ What would it take to establish a program in the city?
- ⊙ Does the city have enough existing attractions to build a tourism industry?

Design Guidelines: city officials, Chamber of Commerce, developers

- ⊙ Does the city have significant historical character?
- ⊙ Can the city adopt design guidelines to ensure the compatibility of new development with its historical character?

Visioning: residents, city leaders

- ⊙ What is the city like today, both strengths and weaknesses?
- ⊙ In what ways is the city likely to change in the coming years?
- ⊙ What kind of city do residents want?
- ⊙ What would it take for the city to achieve that vision?
- ⊙ Can the city put together the resources for a comprehensive planning effort?

PLANNING FOR THE RELIEF ROUTE

THINGS FOR TxDOT TO THINK ABOUT

Alignment

- ⊙ Does the land adjacent to the proposed alignment have potential for new development, given topography, existing land uses, and other possible constraints?
- ⊙ Does the proposed alignment move any junctions with other highways and what does this mean for traffic patterns through town?
- ⊙ Have local leaders, landowners, and business owners had an opportunity to contribute to the planning of the alignment?

Access to town

- ⊙ Does the proposed relief route provide enough access points into the town?
- ⊙ Are the proposed access points located in places that:
 - enable new development?
 - make it easy for travelers to get into town?
- ⊙ Have local leaders, landowners, and business owners had an opportunity to contribute to the planning of the access points?

Visibility

- ⊙ Will drivers be able to see businesses located at the relief route exits?
- ⊙ Will the drivers be able to see the city itself from the relief route?
- ⊙ Have local leaders had an opportunity to evaluate and comment on the probable visibility from the proposed relief route?

Signage

- ⊙ Has the city's name been included as frequently as possible on all standard highway signs?
- ⊙ Can the city qualify for general service or logo signs describing businesses in the community?
- ⊙ Can the city qualify for any other kinds of signs, for example, special generator signs?
- ⊙ Could the city install community pride signs?
- ⊙ Have local leaders had an opportunity to review plans for signage on the relief route?

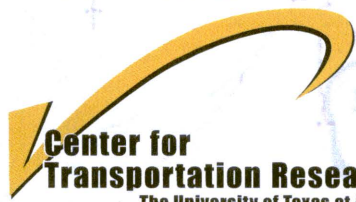
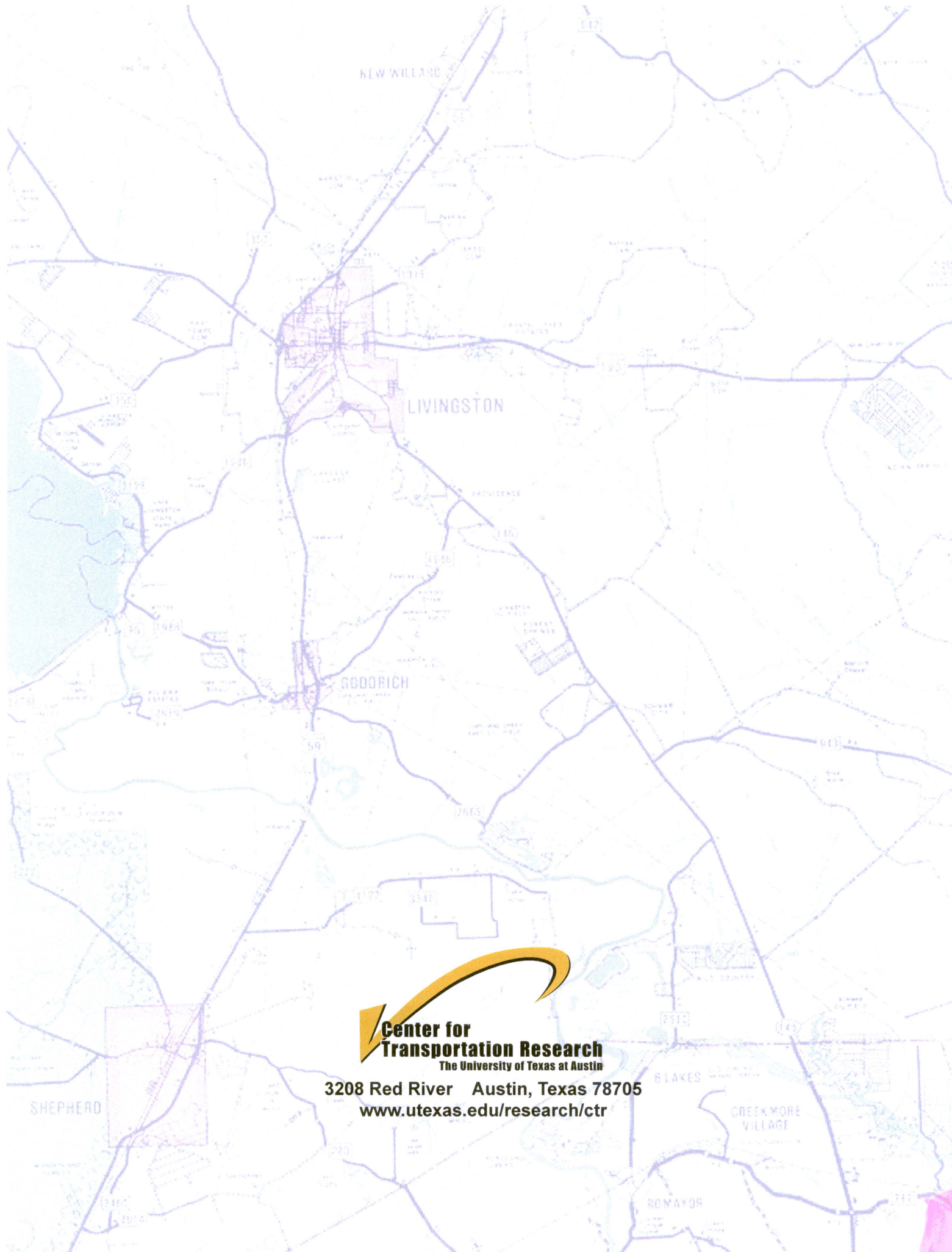
Amenities

- ⊙ Is this city a candidate for any special amenities at exits, such as a rest stop or an information kiosk?
- ⊙ Have local leaders had an opportunity to give suggestions for amenities that might be incorporated into the proposed relief route?

Local Involvement

- ⊙ How does the community feel about the proposed relief route?
- ⊙ Has TxDOT effectively provided information to the community about the planning of the relief route and the constraints that TxDOT faces in its planning?
- ⊙ Has TxDOT effectively provided information to the community about possible impacts of the relief route and steps the community can take to plan for the relief route?

- ⊙ Has TxDOT given local leaders, landowners, business owners, and residents a meaningful opportunity to participate in the planning of the relief route?
- ⊙ Is TxDOT working together with the community to ensure project that successfully balances the competing needs for a relief route?



**Center for
Transportation Research**
The University of Texas at Austin

3208 Red River Austin, Texas 78705
www.utexas.edu/research/ctr